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CATECHETICS, EDUCATION AND THE ADOLESCENT
A TIME FOR DECISION

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PART I

THE CHILD, HIS HOME AND ENVIRONMENT

There once was a kingdom which possessed a rare and beautiful pearl of great price. Fearing that powerful enemies might rob them of this pearl, the rulers of the kingdom built a strongbox in order to insure its safety and security. This jewelbox was kept in the center of the castle and was always well guarded, until in time it was forgotten and its security was taken for granted. Occasionally some members of the court would remember the pearl of great price, but in time it seemed to be gradually forgotten and rejected. It was still important, but eventually no one really understood its purpose and value. In this parable the pearl refers to the child of a Christian family and the kingdom is the family.

The child is the precious expression of love that is in the family. It is about the child that this treatise is written. For my purpose in this treatment I will not distinguish the child, or children, by sex or age except for special category of adolescence. This specification will be noted later, and it will be handled separately.

The first thing that we can determine about children is that they belong to their parents and to God. Christian faith particularly teaches that all human beings owe their creation and conservation in being to Almighty God. The responsibility of generation and love

is the endowment that God gives to parents. By their fulfilled love they share in the work of God, who touches humanity through the soul. The soul is the infused image of the Creator. The child then is not an adjunct, but an integral and precious element of the family, the first and pristine society. It is in the home that the child begins to learn. It is there that his personality begins to develop. The child's experiences teach him about everything. What his parents say and do, how they act and react, all that he sees and hears impresses the mind and the will of the child. He gradually comes to know more and more and soon begins to reach out to others with the love that his parents have from the beginning shared with him. Very soon he becomes influenced by people outside of the family. It might be the child next door who plays with him, and perhaps with whom he occasionally argues and fights. Likewise the child also influences others either positively or negatively. If his experiences are valuable the child begins to grow, as Jesus did, 'in age, wisdom and grace.' Another way of saying it is that he matures spiritually, psychologically and emotionally, as well as physically. In a short time he desires to be somebody.

'To be somebody'? - Isn't the child already a person at the time when he is only one minute old? Let's return briefly to the story of the precious pearl. The kingdom and the pearl are both valuable, and so it is with the family and the child. No, even

more so in the latter case, since the child is part of the family in a way that makes the original analogy limp. The home and the child are both important. One loses its value without the other. Neither home nor child can be properly understood out of context. The influence of one on the other is at the same time simultaneous and reciprocal.[1] Rogers further states that in separate studies made by college counselors who dealt with the personal, social and vocational problems of college students the following measurements resulted. 83 percent attributed their failures in life to the environmental home conditions in early childhood. 86 percent credited their early domestic atmosphere as the major reason for their personal, social or vocational success. The results of this survey, conducted in some of our major colleges and universities in 1961, indicate that it is undoubtedly in the home that personality traits and characteristics are originally realized, determined and related to future progress in life.

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[1]Carl R. Rogers, pp. 12-68.

PART II

THE CHILD AND THE SCHOOL - THE OUTER SOCIETY

Educators tell us that in addition to family life, and perhaps second only to it, the school and the church have great significance in the personality development and the social and educational progress of the older child, the adolescent. To this they add the adolescent's relationship with his peer group.[2] Volumes have been written about the relationship of the adolescent with his parents and the school. Authorities who are involved in the guidance and counseling of adolescents are just as keenly aware that the role of the school is to augment the education received at home. It seems hardly necessary to stress the essence of this educational augmentation. Only the peer group to which the adolescent belongs, or whom he uses as a reference group, can be said to be equally important as the home and the school. We can not and must not deny that much learning, interacting and emotional as well as moral influence affects the full education of America's teenager.[3]

There are several important factors then that aid or detract from the educational development of the adolescent.

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[2]Lee and Pallone, pp. 84-103.

[3]Keefe, p. 235.

Interested parents provide their children with the best schools, the best teachers and other educational agencies and facilities according to their means. In the United States of America our children have many opportunities to develop their innate and God-given talents. Only the less affluent in the American society are without these opportunities. I pray that the time will come very soon when I can make this statement into a more general axiom.

Worldly success and all that amounts to mundane prosperity today demands that factual knowledge of the arts and sciences be properly and effectively imparted to the child. Responsible men and women in government are aware of the need to give schools financial assistance, and to help in providing vocational and educational guidance to children of all ages. The welfare of the child and the adolescent demands that many people in the so called 'outer society' give their regular and constant attention to the over all growth and development of the whole person of the child and adolescent. It is in places where the young person actually lives and learns that he can be best influenced. This outer society is located in places where he plays his games, finds his entertainment, as for example through the influence of the mass media, but most particularly where he initiates either superficial or perhaps even lasting social contacts. Last but not

least he can be influenced in the place where he and his family worship God.

Interest in the adolescent's welfare specifically involves the understanding that he desires to make social contacts at many levels. The adolescent wants adults in his life to be interested in his friends, and he will rebel only at feigned interest or at mere disciplined surveillance. He desires to be encouraged, assisted, inspired, corrected. If he is taken for granted he usually will interpret this attitude as a lack of love for him. If he is overly protected in the home he may easily become frustrated at the unnaturalness of his shelter. The adolescent is factually not a precious jewel, like the pearl put on an occasional social display, but rather a living person who needs other persons in order to survive in the greater social family of man.

It is becoming more and more evident that today's adolescent is demanding to know his identity. He knows enough when he reaches puberty to demand his autonomy and independence as a human person. He also seeks ways to improve his life and help other people around him. This is the somebody that he wants to be, and he has a right to expect that others will help him to achieve this right. He loves his home, his parents and brothers and sisters, and he desires to share his life and love with them and with others outside the home. His confidence in himself and in others grows only when he learns that others desire to be his friends and to

assist him. He matures emotionally and psychologically when he is convinced that people are interested in him personally with no desire for exploitation. He learns regretfully at times that he can be exploited. In the school and in the church he will hopefully meet men and women whom he will be able to trust and have utmost confidence in. It is in the areas of formal education and religious education particularly, though surely not exclusively, that we wish to focus our attention in the matter of the maturing of the adolescent. It is from this perspective that we will look at catechetical counseling. Catechetical counseling can be simply defined as giving whatever guidance is needed for the individual to grow in light of the good news of the message of Christ's gospel.

PART III
RELIGION AND THE CHILD

In this area we concentrate specifically on Christian catechetical training as the aforementioned definition of catechetics indicates. The Christian tradition teaches the importance of some kind of formal religious education. Catholic parents have heard incessantly the sermon of the necessity of the Catholic parochial school. Religion classes in the Christian tradition of Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) or Sunday School have also been stressed repeatedly for Catholics and Protestants. Often the parents were threatened with moral culpability if they ignored this obligation towards their children. Youngsters were often cajoled and lured with recreational activities as part of their reward for religion class attendance. The learning format was rather stilted. Questions and answers drawn from a catechism or bible reader would be used for a test. Passing the tests would be the criteria whether or not the teaching was effective. Successful completion of the requirements of regular attendance and passing the tests would presumably assure that the individual would be a good Christian and would achieve eternal happiness. It all seemed very boring to say nothing of the atrocious misuse of logic. And so the common excuses for lack of attendance at religion classes were such as, "my daughter is a cheerleader...she has too much homework...she's too

shy and afraid to meet people...I can't force him...we give our kids all the religion they need at home...our children have made their 1st Communion and Confirmation etc. etc."

Catechetical renewal tells us that the old methods fell short, and urges on all young people and their elders that the idea of learning how to live is done better by living and interacting with others than by learning subject matter from a book. There is a need to distinguish between 1. learning the facts about God and 2. living these facts in truth.[4] Father Hofinger further states that we have for so long thought that the knowledge of theology alone sanctified and made men happy. The point that he emphasizes is that theological science has a very different purpose from catechetics. Theology is a disciplined and detailed contemplation of divine revelation, taught primarily from the perspective of objective truth without necessarily considering specifically and subjectively individuals' life values. Catechetics, on the other hand, treats the very same doctrine from a different viewpoint. Catechetics is a science which contemplates God and His revelation as a value for the individual person. The same doctrine is truth for living. The problem with the old method of teaching religion is that the answers, even when they were understood, frequently did not relate well to the practical of life and love with God and neighbor. The

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[4]Johannes Hofinger, pp. 90-130 ss.

new approach is called 'kerygmatic' or 'community centered.' The current catechesis involves the teacher and the learners and the Christian community in the practical way to live the gospel message. Modern religious learning does not eradicate all mystery from religion and all reliance on faith. What is learned primarily is the way that these mysteries of God and faith in Jesus' gospel can be shared and how in them there can be personal interaction. The further meaning of the kerygmatic approach is that it contains a message that the community shares. This further amplifies the practical value of current catechesis, since message presumes messengers which necessitates activity, communication and movement. If the church was ever in need of active apostles, it needs them now. There is much movement against Christianity in modern society. Modern catechetics aims to make a team of adults and youth, men and women who administer the teaching process and those who are ministered to within the process. Kerygmatic catechetics is an aim to be a movement towards.

Teaching religion and learning religion ought to be a common experience shared by both teachers and learners, and above all else the objective of such pedagogy is that there is mutual expression, unhindered demonstration and loving cooperation. Unless the religion teacher or catechetical counselor creates an atmosphere that is non-patronizing, but in every way advantageous to the community of the class, the effort of his or her ministry will be

in vain. The setting must be such that the relationship between student and God, student and student, child and parent, teacher and student etc. etc. can be perceived and imitated according to the gospel and so able to be lived out in practical and daily circumstances. To do this is not easy. Nevertheless Christian educators do not have the luxury of time. God will give the church every blessing that it needs to revitalize itself. He will also abide with many honest errors, but it is wrong to imagine that the church can convince its own members by mere dialectic dogmatism. More so it is ludicrous to think that we in the church can be witnesses to the world of the good news of Christ's gospel by either knowing the catechism answers or by waiting till we comprehend these answers better. A time for decision is near, if not already here.[5]

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[5]Christopher Kiesling, pp. 88-90.

PART IV

A TIME FOR DECISION

Educators will immediately question as to what kind of format may be appropriate to carry out such an active venture. Current writers are ready to give suggestions. Some may be found in my bibliography. Many plans have been used, and some have been found wanting in the past few years. Much depends on the catechist himself, what is locally available, the desires of a community etc. The catechetical supervisor and all who are involved in religious education must be ready to implement, to revise and to be sufficiently diverse and imaginative. At least this much we can learn from other educational areas including the mass media. Finally we suggest here only that creative plans include somewhere liturgically meaningful relationships, socially centered activities and positive individual and group acts of true Christian charity within the community. In these ways the church in a crisis responds to God's call by becoming aware again of its responsibility for the world by opening a truly meaningful dialogue with Christians and all peoples. There is no better way, and no more attractive way for the child to learn about Jesus Christ than to live from his earliest years the words of Christ, "as long as you did this for the least of my brothers you have done it for Me." (Matthew 25:40)

Continually the adolescent cries out to be recognized. As he arrives at puberty his sex and age matters a great deal. Even more he seeks and demands his identity and independence as a person. It is evil for authority to shrug him off and tell him that he must wait till he is 21 years old before he can be an active and responsible Christian. It is most important that Christian educators strike a proper balance therefore between Christian social action as a legitimizer of faith and the emphasis on the personal and spiritual growth of the adolescent. To this extent I quote from the United States Army Tradoc/Forscom Chaplains' Training Packet of September and October 1974.[6] "...the 1950s could be described as a decade of optimism in the churches and political sciences among youth while the 1960s might be called the decade of despair and disillusionment in the churches and political activism among youth. The 1970s appear to be a decade of affirmation...This affirmation is apparent in a growing religious interest by youth outside the traditional institutions of religion but within the heritage of the Judaic-Christian understandings. The institutional church 'can' experience affirmation in a redefinition of the local worshipping congregation as the primary focus for ministry and in the recognition that the typical con-

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[6]Youth Group Programs US Army Chaplain Center and School, Ft. Wadsworth, N.Y. under the direction of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command, Ft. Monroe, Virginia.

gregation cannot be seen as a homogeneous gathering of like minded people with the same values, aspirations and needs." (And I might add with the same stereotyped answers either.) This same recent article goes on to proclaim well that when youth are involved in serving they understand service, "and the learning that takes place is a kind of personal transformation." It is further clear from an analysis of this article that we can no longer categorize religion and religious learning away in its own niche and corner. Political science, sociology, psychology and even the other more technological sciences relate as much to the God living among us as the Sacred sciences do. The young man and woman knows these disciplines from his and her many involvements in the school, through the mass media etc. If the institutional church is incognigant of these facts then its ministry is surely to be less involved with reality and so deserves whatever apathy and ridicule that it receives.

Ross Snyder in his book called YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR CULTURE, quoted in the aforementioned article, states that religious involvement with youth requires that we provide opportunities for relational and interpersonal ministeries to include the following: 1. Authenticity - consideration of self and my style in relating to people around me. 2. Mutual ministry of self - revelation - in which an individual presents his beliefs where they can be challenged by the boundaries of another 's convictions. 3. Ministry of understanding and midwifery - When we let the new that is

struggling to be born within youth take the lead while we follow it, rather than trying to take over their development within our own hands and impose our shape and direction upon them. 4. Ministry of great conversation - carried on in small groups whose members match themselves against the great problems of life in a two-way communication about emerging ideas and issues felt to be significant. 5. Ministry of culture content - in which we train ourselves and others to acquire the inner world of other men and the hidden significance of crucial events for the purpose of explaining our own integrity.

The challenge is great, but the possibilities are indeed thrilling. The church in order to become alive again needs to become less restrictive. The old institutions are not crumbling. The home, the school, the place of worship are immensely important, and so too are the principles that have made these institutions sacred in the centuries past. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, the Sunday School or whatever name that we give to the educational plan of the future reflects on the command that Jesus gave to the church, 'Go teach all nations and make disciples of all men!' (Matthew 28:28) That has never changed through 20 centuries of Christian living. What makes the possibilities thrilling in this age is that perhaps, God willing, the community of Christ's faithful, living on earth today, will be more and more involved with people where people are. It is probable that the young people

of this decade are the men and women who will live in the next decade in a time of decision. Perhaps a better way of saying this is that the time of decision is here and now. The world awaits the results of this decision in the voices of those who are just beginning to be heard.

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